



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 6, 2024

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Sarasota Opera Finalizes International Cast for Winter Festival

Sarasota, FL— Victor DeRenzi, artistic director and principal conductor, and Richard Russell, general director, have finalized the casting for Sarasota Opera’s 2025 Winter Opera Festival. The season opens Saturday, Feb. 15, and will feature Pietro Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* and Ruggero Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci*, Gioachino Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Giuseppe Verdi’s *Stiffelio*. The casts of internationally recognized artists include some company favorites, along with singers making their company debuts.

Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci*, two verismo operas of love and betrayal, will feature four Sarasota Opera favorites.

Mezzo soprano Lisa Chavez, a California native, who last performed the title role in Massenet’s *Thérèse*, and Fidalma in Cimarosa’s *Il matrimonio segreto*, will return as Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana*. This is her ninth principal role with the company. She has been described as possessing a “plush storm of a voice,” a “graceful stage presence,” as well as being “a powerhouse both vocally and emotionally.”

Last season she was the mezzo soloist in Verdi’s *Requiem* with the Savannah Philharmonic, debuted the role of Prince Orlofsky with Opera in Williamsburg and performed in the 75th anniversary gala concert with Shreveport Opera. She also joined Opera San Jose for a reading of

Zheng, a new opera composed by Shinji Eshima with libretto by Tony Asaro delving into the life of Zheng Cao.

Chavez was seen with New York City Opera in a “star turn” as Maggie in the premiere of Bell/Campbell's *Stonewall* commissioned for the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising. Other roles performed with the company include the title role in *Carmen*, Dolores in *Dolores Claiborne*, Paula in *Florencia en el Amazonas*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto*, and was also involved in the Hal Prince production of *Candide*.

Puerto Rican tenor Rafael Dávila, celebrating his 21st season with Sarasota Opera, will sing the roles of Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana* as well as Canio in *Pagliacci*. Dávila recently completed his sixth season with the Metropolitan Opera where he performed the roles of Ismaele in Verdi's *Nabucco* and Don José in the company's new production of *Carmen*.

International engagements include his debut at the Liceu de Barcelona, San Francisco Opera and Opera de Valencia in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*; *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* for The San Carlo Theater in Naples and Macerata Festival in Italy; *Tosca* for Leipzig Opera in Germany; *La bohème* for The National Opera of the Netherlands; *Aida* for Opera Manitoba in Canada and Opera de Valencia in Spain; *Carmen* and *La traviata* for The New Zealand Opera; and a Zarzuela Gala at the Marinsky Theater in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

Baritone Jean Carlos Rodríguez, a native of the Dominican Republic, will sing the roles of Alfio in *Cavalleria rusticana* and Tonio in *Pagliacci*. He sang Enrico in last season's production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and sang in *The Music of Giuseppe Verdi* concert this past November. He also performed Germont in *La traviata* and the title role in *Gianni Schicchi* with Opera Tampa. His love of opera began in high school and in 2017 he was accepted into the Sherrill Milnes' Savannah Voice Festival where he sang the title role of Figaro in *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Soprano Ashley Milanese will sing the role of Nedda in *Pagliacci*. Last season she made her Sarasota Opera debut in the title role in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and joined Opera in the Heights as Mimi in Puccini's *La bohème*. She has toured with Komische Opera Berlin's production of *Die Zauberflöte* and has performed in the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York City.

Cavalleria rusticana and *Pagliacci* will be conducted by Sarasota Opera artistic director and principal conductor Victor DeRenzi, directed by Martha Collins, with set design by David P. Gordon. Costumes and lighting for all this season's productions are by resident costume designer Howard Tsvi Kaplan and resident lighting designer Ken Yunker. Hair and makeup are by Susan

Sittko-Schaefer and Joel Schaeffer. *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* will be sung in Italian, with English supertitles for 10 performances through March 29.

Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, one of the most beloved comedic works in the operatic repertory, will open Saturday, Feb. 22.

Korean-American tenor, Hak Soo Kim, will sing the role of Count Almaviva, who is determined to win the heart of the beautiful Rosina. This is his seventh season with Sarasota Opera. His most recent performance here was as Lindoro in *L'italiana in Algeri*. He was a resident tenor at Los Angeles Opera. When he isn't singing opera, Hak Soo Kim, formerly head sommelier at Per Se restaurant in New York City, is consulting for restaurants.

Mezzo-soprano Lisa Maria Rogali will make her Sarasota debut as Rosina. She has sung Hansel in Opera Birmingham's *Hansel and Gretel* and sang the title role in *Carmen* with Virginia Opera this fall. Opera News described her debut performance with Minnesota Opera as "a tour de force of diction, precision and pizzazz."

Italian baritone Filippo Fontana will return to Sarasota Opera to reprise the the role of Figaro. This is his eighth season with Sarasota Opera, where he most recently sang the roles of Nanni in *L'infedelta delusa* (2024), Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* (2023), and Count Robinson in *Il matrimonio segreto* (2022). In 2020, Fontana sang the title role in *The Barber of Seville* at the Teatro La Fenice, and the role of Dandini in *La Cenerentola* at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma in 2019.

Italian bass-baritone Stefano de Peppo will sing the role of Doctor Bartolo. He has a long history with Sarasota Opera and last sang the role of Leporello in the company's 2023 production of *Don Giovanni*. Internationally acclaimed, de Peppo has sung throughout the United States, Europe, the United Kingdom and Australia. He sang Mustafà (*L'Italiana in Algeri*), Dulcamara (*L'Elisir d'amore*), Geronte (*Manon Lescaut*), Sulpice (*La Fille du regiment*), don Alfonso (*Così fan tutte*), and Sacristan (*Tosca*) with various companies including Hamilton Opera in Canada, Connecticut Grand Opera, New Jersey Opera, Teatro Villamarta, Teatro Cervantes, Gran Teatro de Cordoba, Gran Teatro de Zaragoza, and Opera de Tenerife.

Bass Young Bok Kim, marking his 21st year with Sarasota Opera, will sing the role of Basilio. In Sarasota, he has sung the title role in Verdi's *Attila*, Sparafucile in Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and Raimondo in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, among others. A native of South Korea, he has also sung Don Alfonso in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with the National Opera of Korea and the

Seoul Metropolitan Opera. Kim currently lives in New York where made his New York City Opera debut as Colline in *La bohème*.

The Barber of Seville will be conducted by Marcello Cormio, directed by Marco Nisticò, with set design by Jeffrey W. Dean. Hair and makeup are by Susan Sittko-Schaefer and Joel Schaeffer. It will be sung in Italian, with English supertitles for 10 performances through March 29.

Continuing the story of *The Barber of Seville*, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* opens Saturday, March 8.

Baritone Jake Stamatis, originally from Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania, will sing the role of Count Almaviva. Formerly a Sarasota Opera studio artist, he has also been a fellow at the Music Academy of the West and an artist in residence with Tri-Cities Opera and Opera Memphis. His varied repertoire also includes Enrico in *Lucia di Lammeroor*, the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Zurga in *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, La Bête in *La Belle et la bête* (Glass), and Anthony in *Sweeney Todd*.

Soprano Michelle Johnson will return to sing the role of Countess Almaviva. She has sung the title role in the company's 2016 production of Verdi's *Aida*. Johnson has performed the title role in Puccini's *Tosca* with Opera Philidelphia, Mimì in Puccini's *La bohème* with Nashville Opera, and Bess in Gerhwin's *Porgy and Bess* with Des Moines Metro Opera. As a Grand Prize Winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, she has been hailed by critics as "a clear audience favorite," lauded for her impeccable breath control and velvety voice. Johnson has also made a name for herself as one of the most in demand Aidas in the opera world today, performing Verdi's tragic heroine with Glimmerglass Music Festival and Knoxville Opera, among others.

Soprano Virginia Mims will sing the role of Susanna. She has sung the role of Zemfira in Rachmaninoff's *Aleko* and Cleopatra in Händel's *Giulio Cesare* with IU Opera Theater, and Susanna in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* at Brevard Music Center. She holds prizes and grant awards from prestigious organizations such as Schmidt Vocal Foundation, YoungArts Foundation, Orpheus Vocal Competition, and Il Circolo of the Palm Beaches.

Italian bass-baritone Mattia Venni will make his Sarasota debut as Figaro. He most recently performed as Sulpice in the Parnassus Society's February 2024 production of Donizetti's *La Fille du Regiment*. Venni had a successful career in the film industry as a camera operator in Paris, France and Los Angeles, California prior to switching careers in 2019. In 2020 he enrolled

in UCLA after being accepted to two prestigious institutions: Conservatory Giuseppe Verdi in Milan, and Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome.

Mezzo-soprano Tessa Fackelmann will make her Sarasota Opera debut as the Cherubino. Ms. Fackelmann was heard at Santa Fe Opera in Gregory Spears and Tracy K. Smith's *The Righteous* and as in Dvořák's *Rusalka*. Bass Brian Kontes will return to Sarasota to sing Bartolo. Previously, he sang the role of Sarastro in Sarasota's 2019 production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. He recently sang the role of Don Basilio in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* at Pittsburgh Opera.

The Marriage of Figaro will be conducted by Louis Lohraseb and directed by Tom Diamond, with set design by J. Michael Wingfield. Hair and makeup are by Susan Sittko-Schaefer and Joel Schaeffer. It will be sung in Italian, with English supertitles for seven performances through March 28.

Last seen in Sarasota in 2005, Verdi's opera about infidelity and forgiveness, *Stiffelio*, opens Saturday, March 15. "Written by Verdi at the same time as *Rigoletto* and *Il trovatore*, *Stiffelio* was only rediscovered in 1968 after more than 110 years of neglect," DeRenzi said. "We are presenting it this season for the second time in our company's history. It can be placed alongside Verdi's great operas not only chronologically, but also dramatically."

Tenor Victor Starsky will sing the title role. He made his Sarasota debut last season as Don José in Bizet's *Carmen*, and sang in the November concert *The Music of Giuseppe Verdi*. He has sung the roles of the Duke of Mantua in Verdi's *Rigoletto* with Opera Modesto, Radamès in Verdi's *Aïda* at Utah Opera Festival, and Nemorino in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* with Charlottesville Opera. A native of New York City, Victor Starsky roles have included Rodolfo in *La bohème*, Fernando in *Così fan tutte* and Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*.

Canadian-Italian soprano Aviva Fortunata will be back in Sarasota to sing the role of Lina. She made her Sarasota debut in 2023 as Elvira in Verdi's *Ernani* and sang the title role in Verdi's *Luisa Miller* here in 2024. She has sung the title role in *Norma* at Dallas Opera, Giorgetta, Il tabarro and Suor Angelica in *Suor Angelica* at Pacific Opera Victoria; and Guttrune/Dritte Norn in *Götterdämmerung* at the Canadian Opera Company. She was named twice as one of CBC's Top 30 Canadian Classical Artists Under 30.

Baritone Ricardo José Rivera will return to Sarasota, singing the role of Count Stankar. He performed the role of Miller in Verdi's *Luisa Miller* in 2024 and Don Carlo in the company's 2023 production of Verdi's *Ernani*. Last season he also performed Nottingham in *Roberto*

Devereux with Washington Concert Opera, Severo in Donizetti's *Poliuto* with Teatro Nuovo, and Silvio in *Pagliacci* with Opera San Antonio.

Bass Young Bok Kim will sing the role of Jorg, as well as performing in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*.

Stiffelio will be conducted by Sarasota Opera artistic director Victor DeRenzi and directed by Stephanie Sundine, with set design by Steven C. Kemp. Hair and makeup are by Susan Sittko-Schaefer and Joel Schaeffer. It will be sung in Italian, with English supertitles for six performances through March 30.

Sarasota Opera's 2025 Winter Opera Festival

Cavalleria rusticana by Pietro Mascagni and *Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo

Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

February 15, 20, 23 (m), 26

March 1(m), 7, 11, 19(m), 22, 29

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances begin at 1:30 p.m.

Artists:

Cavallerai rusticana

Santuzza:	Lisa Chavez
Turiddu:	Rafael Dávila
Alfio	Jean Carlos Rodríguez
Lucia, his mother	Lauren Paul Studio
Lola, Alfio's wife	Sara Kennedy

Pagliacci

Canio:	Rafael Dávila
Nedda:	Ashley Milanese
Tonio:	Jean Carlos Rodríguez
Beppe, actor:	Alejandro Luévanos
Silvio, Nedda's lover;	Benjamin Dickerson
Conductor:	Victor DeRenzi

Stage Director: Martha Collins
Scenic Designer: David P. Gordon
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker
Hair and Make Up Designer: Susan Sittko-Schaefer

The Barber of Seville by Gioachino Rossini

Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

February 22, 25, 27

March 2 (m), 5, 9 (m), 14, 21, 27 (m), 29

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances begin at 1:30 p.m.

Artists:

Count Almaviva: Hak Soo Kim
Rosina: Lisa Maria Rogali
Figaro: Filippo Fontana
Don Bartolo: Stefano de Peppo
Basilio: Young Bok Kim
Conductor: Marcello Cormio
Stage Director: Marco Nisticò
Scenic Designer: Jeffrey W. Dean
Costume Designer: Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer: Ken Yunker
Hair and Make up Designer: Susan Sittko-Schaefer

The Marriage of Figaro by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

March 8, 13, 16 (m), 19, 22 (m), 25, 28

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances begin at 1:30 p.m.

Artists:

Count Almaviva:	Jake Stamatis
Countess Almaviva:	Michelle Johnson
Susanna:	Virginia Mims
Figaro:	Mattia Venni
Cherubino:	Tessa Fackelman
Bartolo:	Brian Kontes
Conductor:	Louis Lohraseb
Stage Director:	Tom Diamond
Scenic Designer:	J. Michael Wingfield
Costume Designer:	Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer:	Ken Yunker
Hair and Make up Designer:	Susan Sittko-Schaefer

Stiffelio by Giuseppe Verdi

Sung in Italian with English translations above the stage

March 15, 18, 20, 23 (m), 26, 30

Evening performances begin at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances begin at 1:30 p.m.

Artists:

Stiffelio:	Victor Starsky
Lina:	Aviva Fortunata
Count Stankar:	Ricardo José Rivera
Jorg:	Young Bok Kim
Raffaele di Leuthold, Lina's lover:	Jeremy Brauner
Dorotea, Lina's cousin:	Gabrielle Barkidjija

Federico di Frengel, Lina's cousin:	Juan Hernández
Conductor:	Victor DeRenzi
Stage Director:	Stephanie Sundine
Costume Designer:	Howard Tsvi Kaplan
Lighting Designer:	Ken Yunker
Hair and Make up Designer:	Susan Sittko-Schaefer

ABOUT SARASOTA OPERA

Sarasota Opera is entering its 66th Season of bringing world-class opera to Florida's Gulf Coast. The company was launched in 1960 in the historic 320-seat Asolo Theater on the grounds of Sarasota's Ringling Museum of Art. In 1984 the company moved into the former A.B. Edwards Theater—now the Sarasota Opera House. Since then, the company has gained an international reputation as one of the leading regional opera companies in the U.S. through initiatives such as the Masterworks Revival Series and the Verdi Cycle. The company's Sarasota Youth Opera is the most comprehensive Youth Program in the U.S. The Sarasota Opera House, which underwent a \$20 million renovation and rehabilitation in 2007, has been called "one of America's finest venues for opera" by Musical America. Since 1983, the company has been under the artistic leadership of Victor DeRenzi and administrative leadership of General Director Richard Russell since 2012. Sarasota Opera is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Arts and Culture and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts. Programs are paid for in part by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues.

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